

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented): A process for recovering argon by low-temperature separation of air in a rectification system having first, second and third rectifying sections arranged in series, said first and second rectifying sections being connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides, and said second and third rectifying sections being connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides, and said second rectifying section having two subsections, which are not connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides and are arranged in a parallel manner, each of said subsections being in fluid communication with said first rectifying section and said third rectifying section said process comprising:

introducing a fluid that contains oxygen and argon into the first of said two subsections of said second rectifying section, and removing a stream (13) that contains oxygen and argon from said second of the two subsections of said second rectifying section, and

wherein the argon concentration in the stream (13) removed from said second subsection (7, 30) is between 15% and 50%.

2. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 1, wherein said first, second and third rectifying sections are in an air separation column (4) and said second rectifying section (20, 21) has a partition (5) that runs in lengthwise direction of the column, by which said second rectifying section in said air separation column (4) is divided into said a first subsection (6) and said a second subsection (7).

3. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 1, wherein said the rectifying system has at least a first air separation column (4) and a second column (30), wherein said air separation column (4) contains said first rectifying section, said third rectifying section, and said first subsection of said second rectifying section, and said second column (30) is said second subsection of said second rectifying section.

4. (Cancelled):

5. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 1, further comprising feeding said stream (13) removed from said second subsection (7, 30) to a crude argon column (14).

6. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 5, wherein bottom liquid from said crude argon column (14) is returned to said second subsection (7, 30).

7. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 5, further comprising removing argon having a purity of more than 95% from said crude argon column (14).

8. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 5, further comprising removing argon having an oxygen content of less than 10 ppm from said crude argon column (14).

9. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 5, wherein said crude argon column (14) has more than 100 theoretical plates.

10. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 1, wherein packings are used for rectification at least in part in said first, second and third rectifying sections (19, 20, 21, 22).

11. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 10, wherein fluid containing oxygen and argon is collected and/or distributed between said first and second rectifying sections and between said second and third rectifying sections (23, 24, 25).

12. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 1, wherein gaseous fluid containing oxygen and argon that rises within said rectifying system experiences the same pressure loss in said first and second subsections (6, 7).

13. (Currently Amended): A process according to Claim 1, wherein said the rectifying system comprises a pressure column (2) and a low-pressure column (4), and said first, second and third rectifying sections are in said low-pressure column (4), wherein said second rectifying section (20, 21) has a partition (5) by which said second rectifying section is divided into said first subsection (6) and said second subsection, and said fluid that contains oxygen and argon which is introduced into said first subsection is a [[a]] fluid (3), concentrated with oxygen, which is removed from said pressure column (2).

14. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 1, wherein the argon concentration in the stream (13) removed from said second subsection (7, 30) is between 15% and 40%.

15. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 1, wherein the argon concentration in the stream (13) removed from said second subsection (7, 30) is between 20% and 35%.

16. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 7, further comprising removing argon having a purity of more than 98% from said crude argon column (14).

17. (Previously Presented): A process according to Claim 5, wherein said crude argon column (14) has 150 to 200 theoretical plates.

18. (Previously Presented): A process for recovering argon by low-temperature separation of air in a rectification system, said process comprising:

providing a high-pressure column, a low-pressure column and an argon column, said low-pressure column having first, second and third rectifying sections arranged in series, said first and second rectifying sections being connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides, and said second and third rectifying sections being connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides, and said second rectifying section having two subsections, which are not connected to one another on the gas and liquid sides and are arranged in a parallel manner, each of said subsections being in fluid communication with said first rectifying section and

said third rectifying section;

introducing air into said high-pressure column and removing a first fluid stream containing oxygen and argon from the bottom of said high-pressure column;

introducing said fluid stream containing oxygen and argon from the bottom of said high-pressure column into said first subsection of said second rectifying section, and removing a second fluid stream containing oxygen and argon from said second subsection of said second rectifying section, wherein the argon concentration in said second fluid stream containing oxygen and argon is between 15% and 50%;

introducing said second fluid stream containing oxygen and argon into said argon column, removing product argon from the top of said argon column, and removing a liquid stream containing oxygen from the bottom of said argon column;

introducing said liquid stream containing oxygen from the bottom of said argon stream into said second subsection of said second rectifying section, removing product oxygen from the bottom of said low-pressure column, and removing product nitrogen from the top of said low-pressure column.

19. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 18, wherein the argon concentration in said second fluid stream containing oxygen and argon is between 15% and 40%;

20. (Previously Presented): A process according to claim 18, wherein the argon concentration in said second fluid stream containing oxygen and argon is between 20% and 35%;